

When Betty Spoke

By LOUISE J. STRONG

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Betty peeped out cautiously. She would not have them see her for a fortune. Yes, there was Bert, the center of the jolly crowd, and Addie at his elbow. That had been her (Betty's) place for so long that it had come to be considered—And it might have been here yet if Bert had not—Oh, well, of course she was some to blame. It was not all Bert's fault. She admitted that reluctantly, for Betty thought a good deal of her little self. He was dreadfully provoking, but they would have made up weeks ago if she had not gone to such lengths and reared an impassable barrier between them.

"And that's the truth, Betty Brown!" she apostrophized now. "Why did I do such a ridiculous thing? I might just have said I'd never speak to him again; girls always say that. And I ought to have stopped there, but when he grinned so knowingly, as if there was nothing in that, as there isn't usually, I let it provoke me into declaring that if I ever did speak to him again it would be because I had made up my mind to marry him. Why, it will be the same as proposing if I ever speak to him now, when I've evaded—I can never do it," she sighed.

Bert had not been greatly crushed by her ultimatum. He spoke to her cordially at every opportunity in spite of her nonresponse with something like elated expectancy in his manner that stung Betty to a more determined stubbornness.

"I suppose he thinks I will, but he'll see," she said firmly.

She persisted in ignoring him till until at length he seemed to conclude that it was hopeless and avoided meeting her. All the time, of course, Betty had been hoping he would, somehow, make her speak, though she would not have confessed it, nor the disappointment she felt at his finally abandoning his efforts and accepting the situation.

She flirted desperately, which gave her small satisfaction, as it apparently did not disturb him in the least. He flirted, too, and so fervently that it began to look serious in regard to Addie Stark. Betty felt that she was losing all the fun of life and all the joy as well.

She had simulated successfully a gaiety of spirits almost boyishly at the moonlight skating party, but had really been so miserable at seeing those two, Bert and Addie, gliding about, always together, that she had determined not to go to the skating rink. She had refused all offers of escort, but now, at the passing of the gay party, she suddenly changed her mind, whirled on her heel, tucked the becoming cap on her curls and darted after Ned and his chum, who had just started.

"Tagging!" Ned chafed. But he made no objection, for Betty was as good at coasting as any boy of them, fully as fearless and as fleet footed, and now she rushed with them down alleys, through back yards and over fences, going across lots the nearest way.

Thus when the crowd arrived Miss Betty was triumphantly sailing down the longest, steepest course with the yelling boys, cheered by the mob of town youths usually on the hill.

Most of the girls confined themselves to the short, easy slope at the side, unless in charge of a strong, capable escort.

"It is dangerous, just with those boys, Betty," remonstrated her friend, Alice Hoover.

"And it is unadvisable for a girl to go floundering down with a gang of fellows," commented Addie Stark, superciliously.

"You don't dare to, that's all," Betty retorted.

"I'm not the only one, Bert said!" Betty's appearance cut short the speech, and, laughing shrilly, Betty ran away to the boys and coaxed them over to a still steeper spot, where only the more skillful and daring ventured.

Her blood was boiling! So Bert had been criticizing her to Addie! It seemed the boldest treachery. As for Addie—the little cat!—she was envious because she had not the courage to undertake the long descent. She looked scornfully over at Bert, taking tame little flights, with Addie clinging to him shrieking in exaggerated fear. Betty knew how he loved the rush of the long hill, with the jounce at the end that sent them flying across the bottom. They had taken it together many times. Now it was unadvisable of her, was it—and she with her own brother!

Her indignation grew, and with it her recklessness. Little by little she drew the boys toward the post that bore a danger sign, which marked the limit of the coasting ground. Beyond the post the hill was fine, but at the foot the railroad swung up against it as it curved to cross the river, and it was not easy to see a train till it was close at hand. It was plainly no place for coasting, though a few ventured at times, the spice of danger adding zest to the sport.

Betty had always wanted to swoop down and fly across the track, perhaps catching sight of an oncoming train. It would be thrilling! But she had no intention of undertaking it now, though in the mood to go as near it as possible.

"Look out, Ned!" some one called. "You're getting too close there! Better come back."

"There isn't a bit of danger," Betty laughed as they flashed by.

"But you'd better come over here,"

boys had climbed the hill and were preparing to descend again.

"You're so close now a little bump would throw you on the track. Don't you see that, Betty?" Alice interposed anxiously.

"Oh, Betty wants to show off!" Addie sneered, and unfortunately at the same instant Bert commanded:

"Ned, you boys bring your sleds over here at once! You're foolhardy!"

With scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes Betty snatched a sled and ran to a point directly over the railroad and prepared for a downward flight alone. Command her, would he? Of course he meant her! She'd show him! There was an uproar of warning shouts from the young men and shrieks from the girls, but Betty was too angry to heed. As she started another sled shot down diagonally and midway the hill ran into hers, throwing them both into the deeper snow, where they rolled over and over and brought up at last in a tangle on the brink of a plunge just as a train swept along below.

White and shaking at the narrow escape, Betty took herself off the head of her rescuer, sobbing:

"Oh, Bert, Bert! Have I killed you?" At the instant of collision she had seen who it was attempting to stay her foolish flight at the risk of his life. She had been too angry and excited to understand that a train was coming—but she had been silly—so silly!

She covered her face as Bert sat up, saying as he brushed the snow from his eyes:

"It's got to be soon, sweetheart, so I can take proper care of my wife!"

"But you called me unadvisable to Addie, and this would be!"

"It's a mistake. When Addie called you unadvisable I said you were just a good, sweet, wholesome girl and no flimsy lady," he explained, adding calmly: "They think we are about killed, we are so long stirring. They'll be on us in a minute, but we sit here till we understand there's no going back on what you said. You've spoken to me, you know."

"Y-yes," she admitted faintly.

"And you'll fulfill your word soon? They're most here!"

"Y-yes," she said again, blushing hotly.

And he swung her to her feet as the crowd surged about them.

American After Dinner Wit.

"After Dinner Oratory in America" appears to be one of the subjects forever interesting to the British reader. The manner of it would seem to pique him a little and shock him at the same time. In the Nineteenth Century Daniel Crilly gives some account of the origin of the peculiar American habit of treating serious matters humorously after dinner and contrasts a banquet in New York with, say, a Mansion House dinner in London. He quotes Lowell's ingredients of after dinner oratory. "They are," said Lowell, "the joke, the quotation and the platitudes, and the successful platitude, in my judgment, requires a very high order of genius." As an example of American wit Mr. Crilly gives the following:

"I chanced to be in Chicago (said this gentleman at a dinner board to a company of fellow New Englanders) two or three days after the great fire of 1871. As I walked among the smoking ruins if I saw a man with a cheerful air I knew that he was a resident of Chicago. If I saw a man with a long face I knew that he represented a Hartford Insurance company. Really the cheerful resignation with which the Chicago people endured the losses of New England did honor to human nature."

Prisoners of a Great City.

A husband and his wife, respectable looking and well dressed, recently moved into a detached house in the Bronx. They were very quiet and did not mingle with their neighbors, but seemed to enjoy their surroundings, particularly the garden, in which they began work at once.

Of course the neighbors were curious, but all early efforts to find out who the couple were or where they came from proved of no avail. Finally one of the neighbors, meeting the man one day, asked him outright how long he had lived in New York and what his business was.

"Our past is a secret," said the man, "and we are trying to live it down. My wife and I have just completed a long term in prison, and we are now quietly enjoying life."

"Well," said the neighbor, "I am astonished at what you tell me. But I for one do not want to continue to punish those who have paid the penalty of errors in life. What prison were you confined in, may I ask?"

A merry twinkle came into the eyes of the man as he said: "It was a Harlem flat. We were confined there three years!"—New York Press.

Dealing With Bored.

An amusing incident is related of the efforts of certain voters of cards at a club in New York to rid themselves of unwelcome suggestions as to their style of play vouchsafed by boys who persisted in standing about looking over the heads of the players.

One evening one of the players, perhaps the most skillful of any of the members of the club, could endure the nuisance no longer. Rising, he politely asked one of the boys to play the hand for him until his return. The boy took the cards, and the player left the room. Soon afterward the second player followed the example of the first. The two substitutes played for awhile without observing the lapse of time. Finally one of them called an attendant and asked:

"Where are the gentlemen who were playing here awhile ago?"

The attendant grinned. "They're in the next room, sir, playing cards."

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Objections in writing to said report, map and assessment must be filed with the Town Clerk on or before Monday evening, July 17, 1905, at 9 o'clock, at which time the Town Council will meet in the Council Chamber, in the Bloomfield National Bank Building at Bloomfield, in the County of Essex, and State of New Jersey, to consider such objections.
Dated June 15, 1905.
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